

Town of Chester Budget Committee Public Hearing
April 1, 2024
Approved Minutes
7:00 PM

Budget Committee members present:

Ephraim Dobbins, Chair
Kathy Guilmette, Vice Chair
Jack Cannon
Charlotte Lister
Ron McKinnon
Rob Varsalone
Beth Swanson

Budget Committee members absent:

Sabrina Harris, Chester School Board Ex-Officio
Steve Couture, Selectboard Liaison

Guests and members of the public present:

Debra Doda, Town Administrator
Stephen O. Landau, Selectman
Dick Trask, Selectman
James Piper, Supervisor of Roads
Phil Gladu, Fire Chief
Chester PACT

I. Meeting to Order

Chair Dobbins called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Attendance

III. Selectboard Update

There was no Selectboard update.

IV. School Board Update

Ms. Harris was not present to provide an update.

V. New Business

a. Town Budget and Warrant Article Review

Chair Dobbins reviewed the operating budget and Warrant Article review process. He noted the solar working group would like to present their Warrant Article to the Committee. In spite of it not involving an appropriation and the Committee not needing to make a recommendation, they would like to do a presentation anyway.

The Committee discussed the proposed salary increases. They recommended the Finance Director contract remain flat. They questioned the increase in the ZBA assistant's salary and it was explained that it is for additional hours/week. The Committee asked for justification for this.

They also questioned the increase in Transfer Station and Maintenance salaries. Town Administrator Deb Doda explained the Maintenance Director plans to retire this year and they are training his replacement. The Committee also discussed staffing needs in the Maintenance Department. They recommended reducing the salaries in the Transfer Department by \$10,000. Town Administrator Doda noted this salary line is underfunded in this year's budget.

Supervisor of Roads James Piper addressed questions posed at the last Budget Committee meeting regarding the equipment rental line in the Highway Department budget. The Committee recommended reducing this line in light of the new equipment the Department potentially will obtain via Warrant Article. They also suggested lowering the salt line, which could be managed through the Winter Maintenance Fund.

The Committee discussed lowering the COLA from 4% to 2%. They also discussed the longevity bonuses. Town Administrator Doda offered to redo the salaries with a 2% COLA and share this information with the Committee.

The Committee discussed the increase in heating system costs and why there is no Capital Reserve Fund for this in the CIP. Town Administrator Doda said there is a Warrant Article to add \$50,000 from the Unassigned Fund Balance to the Municipal Capital Reserve Fund. Selectman Landau clarified the status of each boiler in the Town Office and Police Department. He also reviewed issues with leaks in the roof.

The Committee reviewed the Recreation budget and discussed the responsibilities of the Director.

The Committee asked for clarification on a number of Warrant Articles, and Town Administrator Doda, Selectman Landau, and Selectman Trask provided it. Fire Chief Gladu answered questions regarding the apparatus replacement fund and the associated Warrant Article. Supervisor of Roads Piper explained the equipment needs of the Department.

The Committee asked for clarification regarding the Unassigned Fund Balance and how it can be used.

b. Budget Calendar

The Committee agreed to change the next meeting to April 9, 2024.

VI. Next Meeting Date - April 9, 2024

VII. Adjourn

Ms. Lister moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:53 p.m. Ms. Guilmette seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary